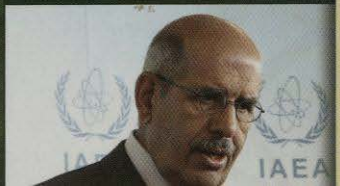

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Table of Contents

Introduction IX
List of Articles XIII
Contributors XIX
Transliteration and Pronunciation Guide XXIII
List of Chronological Events in the Middle East and North Africa Since the End of the Second World War XXVI

BIOGRAPHICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA 1
Nationality and Ethnicity Index 861
Subject Index 865

the icing on the cake and greatly enhance the appeal of this work. Few realize just how much work goes into producing a reference work such as this. Even I, who have worked on several encyclopedia projects in the past, learned much about just what an amazing and daunting task Andrea and Laura faced and how they pulled it off with skill and grace. My heartfelt thanks go out to these two exceptional editors.

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List of Articles

A

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AJRAM, NANCY
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AKKAD, MOUSTAPHA
Sami Moubayed

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Elaheh Rostami Povey

ALAMA, RAGHEB
Alisa Larson

AL-ANI, JANANNE
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AL-AZM, SADIK
Michael R. Fischbach

ALBERSTEIN, CHAVA
Oded Zehavi

AL BU SA'ID, BADR BIN HAMAD BIN HAMOOD
Jeremy Jones

AL BU SA'ID, QABOOS
Calvin Allen

AL KHALIFA, HAMAD BIN ISA
Abdulhadi Khalaf

AL KHALIFA, KHALIFA BIN SALMAN
Abdulhadi Khalaf

ALMAGOR, GILA
Shmulik Duvdevani

AL NAHYAN, KHALIFA BIN ZAYID
John Duke Anthony

AL NAHYAN, MUHAMMAD BIN ZAYID
John Duke Anthony

AL SABAH, NASIR AL-SABAH
J.E. Peterson

AL SABAH, SABAH AL-AHMAD AL-JABIR
Joseph Kechichian

AL SA'UD, AL-WALID BIN TALAL
John Duke Anthony

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Michael R. Fischbach

AL THANI, HAMAD BIN JASIM BIN JABR
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J.E. Peterson

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AR, MUJDE
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Eleanor Abdella Doumato

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AZZAWI, FADIL AL-
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C

CETIN, HIKMET
Mine Eren

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Mine Eren

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Donald Wagner

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Rochelle Anne Davis

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Mona Mikhail

DAYAN, ASSI
Shmulik Duvdevani

DIAB, AMR
Adil M. Asgarov

DJAOUT, TAHER
Kenneth Shonk Jr.

DJEBAR, ASSIA
Hafid Gafaiti

DÜNDAR, CAN
Mine Eren

E

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Nayereh Tohidi

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EBTEKAR, MA'SUMEH
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Laura Ruiz

EL SAHER, KAZEM
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EL SARRAJ, EYAD
Michael R. Fischbach

ERDOGAN, TAYYIP
Yunus Sozen

F

FADLALLAH, MUHAMMAD HUSAYN
Michael R. Fischbach

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J.E. Peterson

FAUDEL
Nora Achrati

FAYRUZ
Virginia Danielson

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GARGASH, ANWAR
Malcolm C. Peck

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Michael R. Fischbach

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Kenneth Shonk Jr.

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GÖLER, NILÜFER
Ozgur Sari

H

HABASH, GEORGE
Rochelle Anne Davis

HABIBI, EMILE
Mona Mikhail

HADID, ZAHA
Michael R. Fischbach

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HAMIDI, IBRAHIM
Sami Moubayed

HANIYEH, ISMAIL
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HANNOUN, LOUISA
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Oded Zehavi

HARBI, MOHAMED
Adil M. Asgarov

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Joseph Kechichian

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Niki Akhavan

HASSAN II
Joseph Kechichian

HATOUM, MONA
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HERSKHO, AVRAM
Michael R. Fischbach

HONDO, MED
Valerie Orlando

HOURANI, HANI
Michael R. Fischbach

HURVITZ, ELI
Yair Aharoni

HUSSEIN, SADDAM
Abbas Kadhim

HUSSEIN BIN TALAL
Joseph Kechichian

I

IBRAHIM, SAAD EDDIN
George E. Irani

ISHAAQ, KAMALA
Kenneth Shonk Jr.

J

JABARIN, HASAN
Amal Jamal

JUBAYR, ADIL AL-
John Duke Anthony

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Khodr M. Zaarour

K

KABLI, ABD AL KARIM AL-
Souad T. Ali

KAR, MEHRANGIZ
H.E. Chehabi

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Ziad Majed

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Michael R. Fischbach

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Tamir Sorek

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Khodr M. Zaarour

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LARIJANI, ALI ARDASHIR
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LIVNI, TZIPI
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MADANI, ABBASSI
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Rasheed Olaniyi

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Gunes Aygok

SFEIR, NASRALLAH
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M. Nazif Shahrani

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Rasheed Olaniyi

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H.E. Chehabi

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SHARAA, FAROUK AL-
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Aomar Boum

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Hiba Husseini

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SISTANI, ALI HUSSEINI AL-
Abbas Kadhim

SOROUSH, ABDOLKARIM
Kristian P. Alexander

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Erdem Aygok

SUAN, ABBAS
Kenda Stewart

SULEIMAN, ELIA
Kamran Rastegar

SUSWA, AMAT AL- ALIM AL-
Michael R. Fischbach

T

TALABANI, JALAL
Abbas Kadhim

TALAT, MEHMET ALI
Gunes Aygok

TALHOUNI, BASSAM AL-
Lena El-Malak

TAMARI, VERA
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WAHBE, HAIFA
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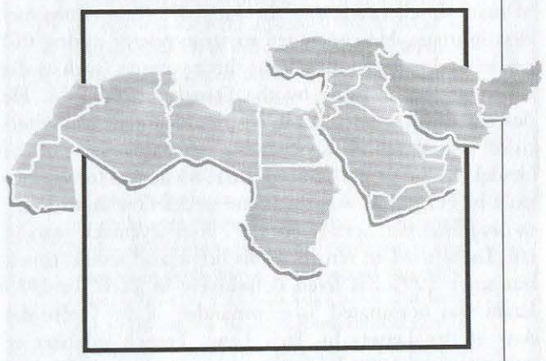

L

LAABI, ABDELLATIF
(1942–)

Moroccan writer Abdellatif Laabi is a French-language poet, playwright, translator, essayist, novelist, raconteur, and activist whose works reveal his engagement with social and political issues and a strong commitment against oppression, injustice, and human rights abuses. He played a key role in the cultural renewal of Morocco in the mid-1960s, restating the complex issue of developing nations nationalism and decolonization.

PERSONAL HISTORY

Laabi was born in Fez, Morocco (presumably in 1942), to a Muslim family of craftsmen, into an illiterate environment. He has pointed out that one of the reasons he started to write was to allow people who are not able to express themselves to speak. His mother, Ghita, was in constant crisis about her condition as a woman, and in a way was a feminist without knowing, Laabi has said; he made her the central character in one of his novels, *La fond de la jarre* (The bottom of the jug, 2002).

Laabi attended the French-Muslim School. At school, children were taught only in French. At that time, he realized his condition of colonization, and this situation generated internal conflict: when he began to write, the only language that he really knew was French, even though his birth language was Arabic. When he was fourteen years old, Morocco declared its independence from France. He entered the University of Rabat where he earned his B.A. in French literature in 1963. After graduation he worked as a French literature teacher at the Lycée Mulay Idris, also in Rabat.

In 1963 he and a number of other writers and artists founded the Théâtre universitaire marocain, where he met his wife, Jocelyne. They staged plays by Fernando Arrabal and Bertolt Brecht, and after only one season they were censored and the theater was closed down. He also founded an important literary review, the journal *Souffles* (Breaths), in 1966; the Arabic version of this journal was called *Anfas*. He founded it with the poets Mohammed Khair-Eddine, a major poet and novelist who died in 1995 in total poverty, and Mostafa Nissaboury, who continues to write and publish. Later on, other artists and writers participated in the project, from Morocco, Algeria, other parts of Africa, France, and one from Germany. *Souffles/Anfas* was considered a meeting point for poets who felt the need for a poetic revival, but soon it was a focus for all Moroccan creative and intellectual actors: painters, filmmakers, theater people, researchers, and thinkers. The magazine lasted for six years and published twenty-three issues in French and eight in Arabic before it was banned in 1972. The magazine allowed an avant-garde movement to be born

albums so far and has appeared in commercials and promotions for Pepsi-Cola since 2001. Fashion is also important to al-Zoghbi, and she has always tried to be at the forefront. Her patronage has furthered the career of the Lebanese designer ELIE SAAB.

LEGACY

It is too early to assess al-Zoghbi's ultimate legacy, but as a popular singer, an impassioned patriot, and to an extent a role model, she has left a mark not only on pop music but Arab culture in general and Lebanese in particular.

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Khodr M. Zaarour

Nationality and Ethnicity Index

Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates)
Al Nahyan, Khalifa bin Zayid, 62–66
Al Nahyan, Muhammad bin Zayid, 66–72
Afghan
Karzai, Hamid, 405–408
Nasher, Farhad, 564–566
Omar, Mullah Mohammed, 590–592
Qanuni, Yunus, 629–632
Samar, Sima, 704–705
Shahrani, Nematullah, 732–734
Algerian
A'raj, Wasini al-, 112–115
Bayyud, In'am, 171–173
Benaïssa, Slimane, 178–181
Boudjedra, Rachid, 204–208
Boulmerka, Hassiba, 209–212
Bouraoui, Nina, 212–215
Bouteflika, Abdelaziz, 215–220
Djaout, Taher, 252–254
Djebar, Assia, 254–259
Faudel, 292–294
Hannoun, Louisa, 334–337
Harbi, Mohamed, 341–344
Khadra, Yasmina, 417–419
Lakhdar-Hamina, Muhammad, 466–469
Madani, Abbassi, 477–481
Mahieddine, Baya, 490–492
Moqaddem, Malika, 543–544
Mustaghanmi, Ahlam, 558–562
Racim, Muhammad, 644–646
Rimitti, Cheikha, 658–662
Sadi, Said, 675–676
Sebbar, Leila, 720–721
Sidera, Zineb, 771–772
Toumi, Khalida, 808–810
Wattar, al-Taher, 825–829
American
AbuKhalil, As'ad, 24–26
Antoon, Sinan, 99–101
Aumann, Robert, 129–131
Boullata, Kamal, 208–209
Ibrahim, Saad Eddin, 383–385
Khalidi, Rashid, 421–423
Khalidi, Walid, 423–427
Khouri, Rami, 444–447
Masri, Mai, 520–521
Noor al-Hussein, 578–581
Portman, Natalie, 618–620
Rafeq, Abdul-Karim, 648–650
Said, Edward, 685–688
Shaheen, Simon, 730–732
Azeri (Iranian)
Khamenehi, Ali, 427–430
Rezazadeh, Hossein, 657–658
Bahraini
Al Khalifa, Hamad bin Isa, 52–56
Al Khalifa, Khalifa bin Salman, 56–60
Salman, Ali, 699–704
Berber
Benaïssa, Slimane, 178–181
Djaout, Taher, 252–254
Hannoun, Louisa, 334–337
Sadi, Said, 675–676
Toumi, Khalida, 808–810
British
Abdullah II bin Hussein, 15–19
El Sarraj, Eyad, 280–282
Hadid, Zaha, 320–323
Hatoum, Mona, 358–362
Yacoub, Magdi, 831–833
Canadian
Zoghbi, Nawal al-, 858–860
Cypriot (Greek)
Papadopoulos, Tassos, 603–605
Cypriot (Turkish)
Talat, Mehmet Ali, 792–793
Dinka (Sudanese)
Mayardit, Salva Kiir, 523–524
Dubai (United Arab Emirates)
Maktum, Muhammad bin Rashid al-, 496–501
Roken, Mohammed al-, 662–665
Dutch
Abu-Assad, Hany, 21–23
Egyptian
Abdel-Moati, Mustafa, 14–15
Amer, Ghada, 93–94
Amin, Galal, 95–97
Ashour, Radwa, 124–125
Boutros-Ghali, Boutros, 220–221
Chahine, Youssef, 232–235
Diab, Amr, 250–251
ElBaradei, Mohamed, 271–274
El Saadawi, Nawal, 276–278
Hakim, Tawfiq al-, 323–326
Hamed, Marwan, 328–329
Ibrahim, Saad Eddin, 383–385
Khaled, Amr, 419–421
Mahfouz, Naguib, 485–490
Moussa, Amr, 544–546
Mubarak, Husni, 547–552
Qaradawi, Yusuf, 632–635
Rauf Ezzat, Heba, 653

United Arab Emirates
Al Nahyan, Khalifa bin Zayid, 62–66
Al Nahyan, Muhammad bin Zayid, 66–72
Gargash, Anwar, 301–302
Maktum, Muhammad bin Rashid al-, 496–501
Roken, Mohammed al-, 662–665
Uzbek (Afghanistan)
Shahrani, Nematullah, 732–734
Yemeni
Nasr, Na'ila, 566–568
Qasim, Awn al-Sharif, 635–636
Salami, Khadija al-, 690–691
Salih, Ali Abdullah, 692–695
Saqqaf, Abd al-Aziz, 705–709
Suswa, Amat al-Alim al-, 787–788
Zindani, Abd al-Majid al-, 855–858

Subject Index

Page numbers in boldface refer to the main biography on the individual. Page numbers in italics refer to a photograph of the individual.

A

AA. *See* Architectural Association
AAB. *See* Arab African Bank
Abadan, Yavuz, 511
Abariq Muhashshama (Bayati), 168
Abath al-Qadr (Mahfouz), 487, 489
Abaza, Aziz, 485
Abba, Dimi Mint Benaissa, **1–4**
music of, 1–3
Abba, Sidaty Ould, 1, 3
Abbas, Ehsan, 169
Abbas, Ferhat, 344
Abbas, Ihsan, 243
Abbas, Mahmud, *4,* **4–8**
after Arafat's (Yasir) death, 5–6
Barghuthi (Marwan) and, 151, 152–153
Dahlan (Muhammad) in government of, 5, 241
in Fatah, 5, 6, 108
Hamas and, 5, 7
Haniyeh (Ismail) as prime minister and, 332
international recognition of role of, 7, 8
in Palestinian national movement, 4–5, 6
in peace process, 4–8
in PLO, 5
political career of, 5–8
as president of PA, 6–8, 241
as prime minister of PA, 5, 7, 241
Rajub (Jibril) in government of, 241
Abbasgholizadeh, Mahboubeh, **8–10,** *9*
NGO activism of, 8–10
women's rights advocacy by, 8–10
Abd al-Aziz ibn Sa'ud Al Sa'ud (Ibn Sa'ud) (ruler of Saudi Arabia), 710
Abd al-Qader, Ahmad ben, **10–13**
poets influenced by, 12
in political opposition, 10–11
writings of, 11–12
Abd al-Rahman, Umar
arrest of, 550
on Mahfouz (Naguib), 488
Abd al-Rahman bin Abdul Aziz, 710
Abd al-Sabbur, Salah, 623
Abdelaziz, Mohamed, **13–14**
Abdel-Moati, Mustafa, **14–15**
art of, 14–15
influence on Egyptian art, 14–15
Abd Rabbo, Yasser, in DFLP, 315
Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 768
Abdullah (king of Saudi Arabia). *See* Sa'ud, Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz al-
Abdullah I bin Hussein (king of Jordan)
assassination of, 163, 376–377
historic preservation relating to, 431
Hussein bin Talal on, 377, 380
reign of, 376
Abdullah II bin Hussein (king of Jordan), **15–19,** *16*
accession of, 17, 379
assassination attempts against, 292
as crown prince, 16, 17, 377, 379
domestic agenda of, 17
Economic Consultative Council formed by, 736
family of, 15–16
military career of, 16–17
in peace process, 17–18
and Talhouni (Bassam al-), 794
U.S. relations with, 17–19
in war on terror, 18
Abid, Karim al-, 330
'Abir Sarir (Mustaghanmi), 560
Abla, Mohamed, 15
About Baghdad (film), 100, 101
Abtahi, Hasan, 19, 20
Abtahi, Mohamed Ali, *19,* **19–21**
blog of, 21
government career of, 19–21
in Iranian Revolution, 19–20
political views of, 20–21
Abtahi, Mohammad Taghi, 20
Abu Ali. *See* Bayati, Abd al-Wahhab al-
Abu Ammar. *See* Arafat, Yasir
Abu-Assad, Hany, *21,* **21–23**
films of, 21–23
on suicide bombers, 22–23
Suleiman (Elia) compared to, 786–787
Abu Dhabi
Al Nahyan (Khalifa bin Zayid) as emir of, 62–65
Al Nahyan (Khalifa bin Zayid) as prime minister of, 63
Al Nahyan (Muhammad bin Zayid) as crown prince of, 66–72
Al Nahyan (Zayid bin Sultan) as emir of, 62, 64, 65, 66
domestic policies of, 70
human rights in, 71–72
international economic aid from, 64, 65, 72
on Iraq, U.S.-led occupation of, 64–65, 69–70
line of succession in, 66, 68
military of, 63

Democracy, ***continued***
Darraj (Faisal) on, 244
Dündar (Can) on, 260
Ebadi (Shirin) advocating, 266
Hourani (Hani) on, 366
in Iran, 266
Islam and, compatibility of, 385, 479, 480, 481
Islamist groups in, 385
in Jordan, 366, 378
in Morocco, 354–355, 554–555
in Qatar, 86, 89
Roken (Mohammed al-) on, 663, 664
Salman (Ali) on, 702
Samar (Sima) on, 704
secularism in, 481
in Syria, 244
in Turkey, 260, 286, 725
in UAE, 65, 302
in Yemen, 706, 707–708
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)
establishment of, 315
Hourani (Hani) in, 366
Democratic Left Movement (Lebanon)
establishment of, 410, 449
Kassir (Samir) in, 410
Khoury (Elias) in, 449
Democratic Left Party (DSP) (Turkey), 782
Democratic Party (Cyprus), 604
Democratic Party (Turkey), rise and fall of, 260
Demokratik Sol Parti (DSP) (Turkey), 782
Demokrat Parti (Turkey), 260
Denktas, Rauf, 782, 793
Denmark, Khaled's (Amr) conference in, 420
Dependency theory, and Jordanian history, 327
Depth of the Water, The (Mala'ika), 502
Derar, Derar Salih, 399
Deri, Aryeh, 844
Dernière Image (film), 469
Dernière nuit d'un damné, la (Benaïssa), 180
Dernier Été de la raison' Le (Djaout), 253–254
Derrida, Jacques, 440
Désenchantement national (Béji), 177
"Desert, The" (Sa'id), 683
Designers, Lebanese
Mahfouz (Abed), 669
Saab (Elie), 667–669, 860
Destiny (film). *See Masir, al-*
Destour Socialist Party (PSD) (Tunisia), 182
Devlet Planlama Teşkilati (DPT). *See* State Planning Organization
DFLP. *See* Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
Dhakirat al-Jasad (Mustaghanmi), 560, 561
Dhofar (Oman), insurgency in, defeat of, 49–50
DHRC. *See* Defenders of Human Rights Center
Diab, Abd al-Basit, 250
Diab, Amr, *250,* **250–251**
in films, 250
music of, 250–251
music videos of, 250, 251
Dialogue, of civilizations, Khatami (Mohamed) on, 437, 438
Dialogue, Western–Muslim
Awda (Salman al-) on, 134
Khaled (Amr) on, 420
Diary of Anne Frank, The (film), 619–620
Diawara, Manthia, 364
Dickens, Charles, 607
Dignity, Darraj (Faisal) on, 243
DIKO. *See* Dimokratiko Komma
Diminni, Ali al-, 711
Dimokratiko Komma (DIKO) (Cyprus), 604
Din, Muhammad Sharaf al-, 709
Dinet, Étienne, 645
Dinet, Nasreddine, 644
Disabilities, Al Sa'ud's (Sultan bin Salman) charity work on, 83
Disaster relief, Abu Dhabi in, 64, 72
Discovery space shuttle, 83
Discrimination
against Jews (*See* Anti-Semitism)
against Palestinians, in Israel, 390, 391
Disengagement plan (2004). *See also* Gaza Strip; West Bank
Israeli media on, 156
Livni (Tzipi) supporting, 473, 475
Netanyahu (Binyamin) on, 576
Olmert (Ehud) and, 587, 589, 590
Sharon (Ariel) and, 751, 752
steps in, 751
Disorientation, in Boudjedra's (Rachid) novels, 205–206
"Divide and Conquer" (Shimoni), 766
Divine Intervention (film), 785, 786
Divorce
in Algeria, 336
in Lebanon, 823–824
Diwans (poetry collections)
by Mahdaoui (Ahmad Rafiq al-), 485
by Qabbani (Nizar), 623
Diwan Sidi Abd al-Rahman al-Majdub (Saddiki), 673, 675
Djaout, Taher, *252,* **252–254**
assassination of, 252, 253
journalism of, 252, 253
poetry of, 253
writings of, 252–254
Djazzaïrouna (film), 467
Djebar, Assia, **254–259,** *255*
academic career of, 255
on cultural identity, 257–259
films of, 255
on history, writing of, 256–259
on Mahieddine (Baya), 490, 492
on women, condition of, 256–257, 807
writings of, 254–259
Djomeh (film), 309
Dlimi, Ahmed, 355
Documentaries
by Abu-Assad (Hany), 22
by Akkad (Moustapha), 33
by Amiralay (Umar), 97–98
by Bakri (Mohamed), 144
by Djebar (Assia), 255
by Dündar (Can), 260–261
by Masri (Mai), 521
by Rashid (Uday), 651, 652
by Salami (Khadija al-), 690, 691
by Suleiman (Elia), 785
Doha (Qatar)
international meetings in, 86, 90
terrorist attack in (2005), 89
Dönmez-Colin, Gönül, 105
Doping scandals, 136
Dorovskikh, Tatyana Samolenko, 210
Dorsay, Atilla, 227
Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, 607
Doumani, Beshara, 649
Dovum-e Khordad. *See* Iranian reform movement
DPT. *See* State Planning Organization
Drama. *See* Theater
Dresch, Paul, 693, 857
Driving, by women, 134
Drug trade, in Afghanistan, 225, 592
Druze community, in Lebanon, Jumblatt (Walid) as leader in, 395–398
DSP. *See* Demokratik Sol Parti
Dubai
airport in, 499
architecture in, 810
business community of, Gargash (Anwar) in, 301, 302
economic development in, 498–499, 500
expatriate workers in, 499, 664, 665
horse racing in, 500
import duties in, 499
Maktum (Maktum bin Rashid al-) as emir of, 496, 500

Maktum (Muhammad bin Rashid al-) as emir of, 496, 500
Maktum (Rashid bin Sa'id al-) as emir of, 498
military of, 498
poetry of, by Maktum (Muhammad bin Rashid al-), 497, 500
prosperity of, 499, 500
ruling family of, 496, 498
Salman (Ali) in exile in, 701
tourism in, 499
Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), 301, 302
Dubai Defense Force (DDF), 498
Due process, in Israel, 149
Dujail (Iraq), 1982 massacre in, 374
Dündar, Can, **259–261**
journalism of, 259–261
on Turkish history, 260
on Turkish politics, 259–261
Duras, Marguerite, 213
Duri, Izzat Ibrahim al-, 494

E

Earthquake, The (Wattar). *See Zilzal, al-* (Wattar)
Eastern Orthodox Church, Ignatius IV as patriarch of, 762
East of Suez strategy, of Britain, 57
Ebadi, Mohammad-Ali, 263
Ebadi, Shirin, **263–268,** *264*
on coup of 1953, 264–265
family of, 263, 264
feminism of, 265, 267
human rights advocacy by, 263–268
Kar (Mehrangiz) working with, 403
Khorasani (Nushin Ahmadi) and, 443
legal career of, 263–268
Nobel Peace Prize won by, 263, 266, 267, 443, 444
political views of, 264–265
writings of, 264, 265, 267
Ebarahimi, Frashad, 266
Eberhardt, Isabelle, 544
Ebnou, Moussa Ould, **268–270**
isolation of, 270
writings of, 268–270
Ebrahimnezhad, Ezzat, 265–266
Ebtekar, Ma'sumeh, **270–271**
in Iranian hostage crisis, 270–271
political career of, 271, 436
writings of, 270–271
Ecevit, Bülent
Çetin (Hikmet) under, 223
Dündar (Can) on, 260
as prime minister, 725
Soysal (Mümtaz) under, 782
Economic aid
from Abu Dhabi, 64, 65, 72
to Jordan, 735–736
Economic Consultative Council (EEC) (Jordan), 736
Economic development
Abu Dhabi funding, 64
in Bahrain, 59, 60
in Jordan, 164–165
in Morocco, 355
in Oman, 49, 50
in Qatar, 90
in Tunisia, 182
in Turkey, 285–286
Economics
Amin (Galal) in, 95–97
Aumann (Robert) in, 129–130
Saqqaf (Abd al-Aziz) in, 705, 707
Economic sanctions. *See* Sanctions
Economies
capitalist, criticism of, 95–97
game theory in, 129–130
women's role in, 36–37
Écrivain, l' (Khadra), 417
Eczacibaşi, Nejat F., 260
Eder, Yehuda, 339
Edge, Brooke, 720
EDGO. *See* Engineering and Development Group
Education
in Algeria, 826
in Iran, 532
in Iraq, 371, 537
in Jordan, 580
in Lebanon, 348
in Morocco, 459, 460
for Palestinian Arabs in Galilee, 229, 230, 231
in Qatar, 89–90, 534, 535, 536, 537
in Saudi Arabia, religion in, 433
for women, 89–90
Educational organizations, Al Sa'ud's (Al-Walid bin Talal) donations to, 80–81
Efendi, Dede, 719
Egypt
in Arab League, 549
Arafat's (Yasir) youth in, 107
art of (*See* Egyptian art)
business community of, Sawaris (Onsi) in, 715–717
censorship in, 277, 488, 665
Coptic Orthodox Church in, Shenouda III as patriarch of, 761–763
Copts in, 715, 761–763
economy of, Amin (Galal) on, 95–97
in Federation of Arab Republics, 558
films of (*See* Egyptian films)
foreign policy of, 220, 272
government of (*See* Egyptian government)
in Gulf War (1990–1991), 549
history of, Mahfouz (Naguib) on, 487, 488, 489
Islamic militants in, 548, 549–550
Islam in, 419–421, 841
Israeli peace negotiations with, 220, 414
Jordanian relations with, 379, 549
Khaled's (Amr) preaching in, 419–421
Libyan relations with, 549
literature of (*See* Egyptian literature)
medicine in, Yacoub (Magdi) in, 831–833
music of (*See* Egyptian music)
national anthem of, 819
nationalization policy in, 715, 716
political science in, Rauf Ezzat (Heba) in, 653
psychiatry in, El Saadawi (Nawal) in, 276–277
Saudi relations with, 549
stem cell research in, 832
Sudanese relations with, 549
Syrian relations with, 121–122
Syrian union with (*See* United Arab Republic)
terrorism in, 550, 761–763
in UN, Boutros-Ghali (Boutros) representing, 220–221
U.S. relations with, 549, 550, 551
women of (*See* Egyptian women)
Yosef (Ovadia) as chief rabbi of, 841
Egyptian art
of Abdel-Moati (Mustafa), 14–15
of Amer (Ghada), 93–94
of Sirry (Gazbia), 772
women in, 93–94
Egyptian Cement Company, 716
Egyptian films
by Chahine (Youssef), 232–235
corruption in, 328–329
government restrictions on, 233–234
by Hamed (Marwan), 328–329
historic epics, 233
musicals, 233
private lives in, 328–329
religion in, 234, 235
Sharif (Omar) in, 746–747

Komisione Banoaan (Iran), 351
Koolhaas, Rem, 322
Kooshyar, Ali, 173
Kop, Yücel, 136
Kotb, Heba, 634
Koza (film), 226–227
Krajeski, Thomas, 857–858
Kseur Platform, 218
Kufic calligraphy, in Boullata's (Kamal) art, 208–209
Kulin, Ayşe, **456–458**
  family of, 456–457
  political activism of, 457
  writings of, 456–458
Kulin, Muhittin, 456
Kunzman, Roman, 43
Kurd(s)
  Barzani (Mas'ud) as president of Iraqi, 158, 160–161
  countries feeling threatened by, 160
  government violence against, 159–160 (*See also* Kurdish genocide)
  in Gulf War (1990–1991), 160, 161
  internal conflict among, 159–160
  Iranian support for, 159
  repression of, 160
  in Turkey, 583–585, 599–600
  in U.S.-led invasion of Iraq (2003), 160
Kurdi, Walid Al, 164
Kurdish culture, 307–309
Kurdish films, by Ghobadi (Bahman), 307–309
Kurdish genocide (1988) (Iraq), 159–160
  Anfal campaign in, 159, 493, 494, 495, 790
  Barzani (Mas'ud) on, 159–160
  chemical weapons used in, 159, 495, 790
  Majid (Ali Hasan al-) in, 159, 492, 493, 494–495, 790
  Talabani (Jalal) targeted in, 790
Kurdish language, 583, 584
Kurdish movement, Hamidi's (Ibrahim) support for, 330
Kurdish music, of Nazeri (Shahram), 573–574
Kurdish rebellions, in Iraq
  of 1974–1975, 159
  after Gulf War (1991), 160, 161
  Talabani (Jalal) in, 789
Kurdish Regional Government (Iraq), establishment of, 160
Kurdistan
  borders of, 307
  Iraqi region of, 158–161
Kurdistan Alliance, 160
Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)
  Barzani (Mas'ud) in, 158–161
  establishment of, 158
  Talabani (Jalal) in, 789, 791
Kurdistan Front, establishment of, 160
Kutchuk, Fazil, 604
Kuwait
  Al Sabah (Nasir al-Sabah al-Ahmad) in government of, 73, 76
  Al Sabah (Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir) as emir of, 73–77
  Al Sabah (Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir) as prime minister of, 74
  Al Sabah (Sa'd al-Abdullah) as emir of, 74, 75–76
  art museums of, 73
  as British protectorate, 74
  business community of, Al Sabah (Nasir al-Sabah al-Ahmad) in, 72–73
  coup of 2006 in, 76
  foreign policy of, 74, 76–77
  human rights in, Mubarak (Ma'suma al-) on, 552
  during Iran–Iraq War, 75
  in Iraq, U.S.-led occupation of, 77
  Iraqi invasion of (*See* Gulf War)
  Islamist ideology in, Abu Ghayth (Sulayman) advocating, 23–24
  line of succession in, 74–76
  Majid (Ali Hasan al-) as governor of, 493, 494, 495
  National Assembly of, 75, 76, 77
  Palestinians in, 519
  political science in, Mubarak (Ma'suma al-) in, 552, 553
  U.S. relations with, 77
  women's rights in, 77, 552
Kyprianou, Spyros, 604

L

Laabi, Abdellatif, **459–461**
  in exile in France, 460
  journal of, 459–460
  poetry of, 460, 461
  translations by, 460–461
  writings of, 187, 460, 461
Labor Party (Israel)
  Am Ehad Party merging with, 617
  on Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and West Bank, 616
  Peres (Shimon) in, 613, 614, 615, 617, 844
  Peretz (Amir) in, 614, 616, 617, 618
  Rabin (Yitzhak) in, 641
  Shas Party in coalition with, 844
Labor rights, in Algeria, Hannoun (Louisa) on, 335, 336
Labor Zionism
  of Peretz (Amir), 617–618
  Shapira (Anita) on, 744, 745
"Ladghat al-Hayya" (El Saher), 279
Lahakat ha-Nahal Entertainment Corps, 337–338
Lahav, Louie, 339–340, 341
Lahham, Duraid, **461–464**
  as comedian, 461–464
  diplomatic career of, 464
  films of, 462–463
  political commentary by, 463, 464
Lahiji, Shahla, 403, 443
Lahoud, Emile, **464–466**, *465*
  as commander of Lebanese army, 465, 466
  image of, 466
  opponents of, 466
  presidency of, 347, 465–466
Laicism, in Turkey, 284, 286
"Laila" (Hanoch), 337, 338
Lakhdar-Hamina, Malik, 469
Lakhdar-Hamina, Muhammad, **466–469**
  on Algerian War of Independence, 467–468
  films of, 466–469
  on French colonization, 467
  on women, 468–469
Lakhdar-Hamina, Tariq, 469
"La Ma Khilsit al-Hakaya" (Zoghbi), 859
Lamara, Jiji, 31, 32
Land, The (film). *See Ard, al-*
Landmine Survivors' Network, 580
Laouedj, Zineb, 561
Larijani, Ali Ardashir, *469*, **469–470**
  Abtahi (Mohamed Ali) under, 20
  in Iranian nuclear program, 470
  Iranian state television headed by, 469, 470
  as Khamenehi's (Ali) adviser, 469
  Supreme National Security Council headed by, 469, 470
Laroui, Abdallah, **470–473**
  education of, 470–471
  in Foreign Service, 470
  as historian, 471–472
  writings of, 471–472
LasSa (tire company), 669–670
Last Summer of Reason, The (Djaout). *See Dernier Été de la raison, Le* (Djaout)
Latin music, Faudel's use of, 293
Laughter and Fun (film). *See Dahahk wa La'ab*
Lavon, Pinhas, 612
Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam, The (Qaradawi), 633
Lawrence of Arabia (film), 747

Lawyers
  Ebadi (Shirin), 263–268
  Jabarin (Hasan), 389–392
  Kar (Mehrangiz), 401–403
  Khader (Asma), 415–417
  Maleh (Haytham al-), 504–505
  Naisse (Aktham), 563–564
  Roken (Mohammed al-), 662–665
  Shehadeh (Raja), 757–760
  Talhouni (Bassam al-), 793–794
Layali, al- (publishing house), 409
Laz, al- (Wattar), 826, 827
League of Arab States
  Egypt in, 549
  Khalidi (Walid) working at, 423, 424
  Moussa (Amr) as secretary general of, 545
  PLO recognized by, 108
Leap of Faith (Noor), 379
Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990)
  Fadlallah (Muhammad Husayn) in, 287
  films about, 521
  Hariri (Rafiq) in, 346
  Jumblatt (Walid) in, 396
  Kassir (Samir) on, 408–409
  Khaddam (Abd al-Halim) in, 414
  Khoury (Elias) in, 449
  Khoury (Elias) writing on, 447, 448
  literature on, 447
  national reconciliation after, 346, 414
  PLO in, 108
  reconstruction after, 346
  Samman (Ghada) on, 705
  Sfeir (Nasrallah) in, 728, 730
  Shaykh (Hanan al-) on, 756–757
  Syria in, 396
  UAE military forces in, 498
Lebanese government and politics
  Aoun (Michel) in, 101–102, 465
  elections of 2005 in, 571
  Fadlallah (Muhammad Husayn) in, 288–290
  Gemayyel (Amine) in, 397, 465
  Hariri (Rafiq) in, 344–348, 571, 859
  Iranian influence in, 289–290
  Jumblatt (Walid) in, 395–398
  Karami (Rashid) in, 414
  Khuri (Bishara al-) in, 726
  Lahoud (Emile) in, 347, 465–466
  Shi'ite Muslims in, 288–290
  Siniora (Fu'ad) in, 397–398
Lebanese literature
  by Khoury (Elias), 447–450
  by Samman (Ghada), 705
  by Shaykh (Hanan al-), 756–757
Lebanese music
  of Ajram (Nancy), 30–32
  of Alama (Ragheb), 37–39
  of Fayruz, 295–299
  of Karam (Najwa), 824
  of Wahbe (Haifa), 824
  Western instruments in, 296
  of Zoghbi (Nawal al-), 858–860
Lebanese Shi'ite Muslims
  Fadlallah (Muhammad Husayn) leading, 287–290
  in Hizbullah (*See* Hizbullah)
  leadership of, struggle over, 288
  during Lebanon War (1982), 288–289
  rise of, 287–288
Lebanon
  Armenian Orthodox Apostolic Church in, 762
  auto racing in, Beschir (Khalil) in, 190–191
  Cedar Revolution in (2005), 25, 347, 397, 571
  censorship in, 756
  Chahine (Youssef) in exile in, 233
  charity work in, 679–680, 824
  Defense and Security Pact (1993) signed by, 466
  divorce in, 823–824
  Druze community in, Jumblatt (Walid) leading, 395–398
  education grants in, 348
  fashion design in, 667–669, 860
  formation of, 726
  government of (*See* Lebanese government)
  history of, Kassir (Samir) on, 408–410
  human rights in, Sadr (Rabab al-) on, 679–680
  Iraqi relations with, 102
  Israeli prisoner exchange with (2004), 570
  Israeli relations with, 346
  Israeli wars with (*See* Lebanon War (1982); Lebanon War (2006))
  Israeli withdrawal from (2000), 570, 686, 750
  journalism of Kassir (Samir) in, 408–410
  journalism of Shaykh (Hanan al-) in, 756
  literature of (*See* Lebanese literature)
  March 14 movement in, 397
  Maronite Catholic Church in, 726, 728–730, 750
  military of, Aoun (Michel) in, 101–102
  music of (*See* Lebanese music)
  nationalism in, of Sfeir (Nasrallah), 727, 728
  National Pact of, 726–727
  Palestinian refugees in, 572
  parliament of (*See* National Assembly)
  religious diversity in, 289
  Sa'id (Ali Ahmad) in exile in, 682–683
  Shi'ite Muslims in, 287–290
  under Syrian control, 409–410, 465–466, 571, 728–729
  Syrian relations with, 346–348, 413–414
  Syrian withdrawal from (2005), 118, 347, 348
  U.S. relations with, 729
  women in, Sadr (Rabab al-) on, 680
Lebanon War (1982)
  Aoun (Michel) in, 101
  Beirut siege in, poetry on, 246
  Fadlallah (Muhammad Husayn) during, 288–289
  Hariri's (Rafiq) donations after, 346
  Jumblatt (Walid) in, 396
  Nasrallah (Hasan) in, 569
  Oz (Amos) on, 595
  PLO in, 108
  Sharon (Ariel) in, 749–750
  Shi'ite Muslims in, 288–289
Lebanon War (2006)
  Ajram (Nancy) on, 31
  Awda (Salman al-) on, 134
  Barnea (Nahum) on, 154–155
  Bishara (Azmi) accused of espionage in, 198
  events in, 571
  Livni (Tzipi) in, 474
  Moussa (Amr) on, 545
  Nasrallah (Hasan) in, 571–572
  Olmert (Ehud) in, 588, 589, 590, 617, 618
  Peretz (Amir) in, 617, 618
  Qatar's response to, 86, 90
  Syria in, 118
  UN-brokered cease-fire in, 571
  Zoghbi (Nawal al-) during, 859
Left, political, and Shi'ite Muslims, 287–288
Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. *See* Adalah
Legal Foundations of the Islamic Government (Montazeri), 541
Legal scholarship, of Barak (Aharon), 146–150
Legal systems. *See under specific countries*
Lehmann, Rudi, 811

Political participation, by women
in Egypt, 383, 384
in Iran, 35–36, 350
Islamic law on, 35–36
Political parties. *See* Opposition parties; *specific parties*
Political prisoners. *See* Prisoners
Political Rights of Iranian Women (Kar), 402
Political science
Mardin (Şerif) in, 510, 511, 512
Mubarak (Ma'suma al-) in, 552, 553
Rauf Ezzat (Heba) in, 653
Politics, Middle Eastern. *See under specific countries*
Pop music
of Diab (Abd al-Basit), 250–251
of El Saher (Kazem), 279–280
of Hanoch (Shalom), 337–341
of Karam (Najwa), 824
of Wahbe (Haifa), 824
of Zoghbi (Nawal al-), 858–860
Popolitika (television program), 513
Popolzai tribe (Afghanistan), 405, 407
Poppy production, in Afghanistan, 225, 592
Popular culture, U.S., Ghasemi (Amir Ali) influenced by, 305
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)
airplane hijackings by (1970), 108, 315, 316
establishment of, 315
groups split from, 315
Habash (George) in, 315–317
ideology of, 315
Jabarin (Hasan) in, 390
on Palestinian statehood, 315
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command (PFLP-GC), establishment of, 315
Populism, of Ahmadinejad (Mahmoud), 27–28
Pornography, and Amer's (Ghada) art, 93–94
Portman, Natalie, **618–620**, *619*
films of, 618–620
Post-Zionism, 514
Pound, Ezra, 169
PPN. *See* Parti du Peuple Algerien
Praxis, 198
Prayer, during space travel, 83, 84
Preparatory Committee of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR), 127
Present Tense (Hatoum), 360, 361
Press and Publication Law (1993) (Jordan), 547
Press censorship
in Egypt, 488
in Iran, 9, 266, 350–351, 436, 443, 606, 680, 742–743, 777, 778
in Jordan, 17, 547
in Lebanon, 756
in Morocco, 459, 555
in Saudi Arabia, 834
Press coverage. *See* Journalism
Preston, Robert, 232
Preventative Security Force (PSF), of PA
Dahlan (Muhammad) in, 239–240
Rajub (Jibril) in, 240, 241
Prière de l'absent, la (Ben Jelloun), 187
Principles of Peace (1977), 6
Prison
Abd al-Rahman (Umar) in, 550
Awda (Salman al-) in, 132–133
Azzawi (Fadhil al-) in, 139, 140
Barghuthi (Marwan) in, 150, 152–153
Belhadj (Ali) in, 478, 479, 480
El Saadawi (Nawal) in, 277
El Sarraj (Eyad) in, 280
Erdogan (Tayyip) in, 284
Habash (George) in, 315
Ibrahim (Saad Eddin) in, 383–384, 385
Kar (Mehrangiz) in, 402
Khamenehi (Ali) in, 428
Khomeini (Ruhollah) in, 427–428, 540
Madani (Abbassi) in, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481
Maleh (Haytham al-) in, 504, 505
Mas'adi (Mahmoud al-) in, 516
Montazeri (Hossein Ali) in, 540
Musrati (Ali Mustafa al-) in, 556
Naisse (Aktham) in, 563, 564
Parsipur (Shahrnush) in, 606
Radhi (Ahmad) in, 647
Sa'adat (Ahmad) in, 153
Sadi (Said) in, 676
Sa'id (Ali Ahmad) in, 682
Samman (Ghada) in, 705
Shahrani (Nematullah) in, 733–734
Shamsolvaezin (Mashallah), 743
Soysal (Mümtaz) in, 781
Turabi (Hasan al-) in, 814
Yasin (Ahmad) in, 836, 837, 838, 839, 848
Zahhar (Mahmud al-) in, 848
Prisoners, political
in Bahrain, release of, 54
Israel–Lebanese exchanges of, 570
Israel–Palestinian exchanges of, 153
in Tunisia, 183
Pritzker Prize, to Hadid (Zaha), 323
Privatization, in Turkey, 781, 782, 783
Privilège du phénix, le (Khadra), 419
Progressive List for Peace (Israel), 198
Progressive National Front (Syria), 117, 121
Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) (Lebanon), 395–396
Prominent People from Tripoli (al-Musrati), 557
Promise at Dawn (film), 250
Prophètes sans dieu (Benaïssa), 179, 180
Prophète voilé, le (Khatibi), 439
Proportionality, principle of, Barak (Aharon) on, 148, 149
Proteins, scientific research on, 236–238, 362
PSD. *See* Parti Socialiste Destourien
PSF. *See* Preventative Security Force
PSP. *See* Progressive Socialist Party
PSR. *See* Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research
Psychiatry
El Saadawi (Nawal) in, 276
El Sarraj (Eyad) in, 280–282
Sadi (Said) in, 675
Psychology, Rabi (Mubarak) in, 637, 638–639
PT. *See* Parti des Travailleurs
Public opinion
on Ahmadinejad (Mahmoud), 28
on Dahlan (Muhammad), 241
Hamarneh (Mustafa) in polling of, 327
on Hizbullah, 571–572
on Livni (Tzipi), 474
Turkish, of U.S., 261
PUK. *See* Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
Purposive interpretation, 148
Purzand, Siamak, 402–403

Q

Qabbani, Nizar, **621–624**, *622*
on Arab women, 621–623
diplomatic career of, 621
feminism of, 621–622
poetry of, 621–624
songs based on poetry of, 623, 819
Qaboos, Sultan. *See* Al Bu Sa'id, Qaboos
Qabr al-Majhul aw al-Usul, al- (Abd al-Qader), 11, 12
Qaddafi, Mu'ammar al-, *624*, **624–628**
and Akkad's (Moustapha) films, 33–34
coup by (1969), 558, 624–625, 627
economic reforms by, 626–627
education of, 624
family of, 628–629
foreign policy of, 625–626
Green Book by, 625, 627
on jamahiriya, 625
possible successors of, 628, 629
regime of, 624–628
September 11 terrorist attacks condemned by, 626
on terrorism, 628
and U.S. bombing of Libya (1986), 626
Qaddafi, Saif al-Islam al-, **628–629**
charity work by, 629
Qaddafi International Charity Foundation (Libya), 629
Qaddumi, Faruq, in Fatah, 6, 108
Qadi, Muhammad ben al-, 12
"Qafila, al-" (Barra), 157
Qa'ida, al-
Abu Ghayth (Sulayman) in, 23–24
bin Ladin's (Usama) role in, 193, 194
establishment of, 194
Faqih's (Sa'd al-) links to, 291, 292
Mas'ari's (Muhammad al-) links to, 291
in Qatar, 89
September 11 attacks claimed by, responsibility for, 23–24
videos made by, 23–24, 291
Zarqawi (Abu Mus'ab al-) connected to, 851, 852
Qa'ida in Iraq, al-, bin Ladin (Usama) and, 194
Qal'i, Nihad, 462
"Qalit li Al-Samraa" (Qabbani), 623
Qamus al-lahjah al-Ammiyah fi'l-Sudan (Qasim), 636
Qanuni, Yunus, **629–632**, *630*
as defense minister, 630
ethnicity of, 629, 630, 631–632
in interim government, 631
Karzai (Hamid) in rivalry with, 631
and Masoud (Ahmad Shah), 629, 630, 631
Pakistan's hostile attitude toward, 631
Taliban opposed by, 630
Qaradawi, Yusuf, *632*, **632–635**
fatwas issued by, 632, 633, 634
in Muslim Brotherhood, 633
as radical extremist, 632, 634–635
as Sunni Muslim scholar, 632, 633
television show of, 633
on terrorism, 635
website of, 633
writings of, 633
Qasa'id (religious poetry), songs to, 818, 819, 820
Qasa'id min Qabbani (Qabbani), 622
"Qasida al-mas'ura, al-" (Asimi), 128
"Qasidat Bayrut" (Darwish), 246
Qasim, Abd al-Karim
coup against (1963), 371
coup led by (1958), 370
Qasim, Adonis Samih al-, poetry of, 246
Qasim, Awn al-Sharif, **635–636**
education of, 635
writings of, 636
Qasim, Shaykh Isa, as Salman's (Ali) mentor, 700, 701, 702–703
Qasir, Samir. *See* Kassir, Samir
Qatar
administrative institutions of, 88
Al Thani (Hamad bin Khalifa) as emir of, 87–91, 534, 535
Al Thani (HBJ) in government of, 84–87
art museums of, 91, 92, 442
Bahraini relations with, 85–86, 90–91
in border disputes, 85–86, 90–91
as British protectorate, 88
civil service in, 88
constitution of, 89, 536
coup of 1972 in, 87
coup of 1995 in, 85, 88, 535
coup of 1996 in, attempted, 88–89
democratization in, 86, 89
economic development of, 90, 535, 536
education in, 89–90, 534, 535, 536, 537
elections in, municipal, 89
elections of 1996 in, 536
foreign policy of, 84–87
Iraqi relations with, 86, 90
Islam in, Wahhabi sect of, 89
Islamist ideology in, 90
Israeli relations with, 86, 90
journalism in, freedom for, 89
on Lebanon War (2006), 86, 90
line of succession in, 89
Madani (Abbassi) in exile in, 477, 479, 480
military of, Al Thani (Hamad bin Khalifa) in, 87, 88
Ministry of Information abolished in, 536
oil in, 85, 88, 90
oil trust fund in, 85
Saudi relations with, 85
terrorism in, 89
U.S. relations with, 86–87, 90
women of (*See* Qatari women)
Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, 537
Qatari Municipal Council, 89
Qatari women
in education, 89–90
expansion of rights of, 89–90
Misnad (Mawza bint Nasir al-) and, 535, 536–537, 538
suffrage for, 89, 90, 536, 538
Qatar University, women at, 89–90
Qazvini, Hashem, 427
Qirbi, Abu Bakr al-, 708
Qissati maa Al-Sh'ir (Qabbani), 623
Qobadi, Bahman. *See* Ghobadi, Bahman
Qoddusi, Ali, 532
Qorvis, 393
Quartet. *See* Committee of the Four (Iraq)
"Quds al-Atiqa, al-" (song), 297
Quds fi Yawm Akhar, al- (film), 22
Queen Zein Al Sharaf Institute for Development (ZENID), 165
Quinn, Anthony, 33
Qur'an
feminist readings of, 9, 36
and jihad, 195
recitation of, in musical education, 295
scientific inimitability of, 856, 857
Shahrani (Nematullah) studying, 734
Qur'an Shinaasi (Shahrani), 734
Qurei, Ahmad, 838
Qurum Contractors, 854
Qutb, Hiba. *See* Kotb, Heba
Qutb, Sayyid
on Western world, 384
young Muslims influenced by, 548
Quwwatli, Shukri al-, 682

R

Raahi Legal Centre for Women, 680, 681
Rabbani, Burhanuddin, presidency of, 406, 630
Rabbinical Supreme Court, Yosef (Ovadia) on, 841, 842
Rabi, Mubarak, **637–639**
poetry of, 637
as psychologist, 637, 638–639
short stories by, 637–638
Rabin, Leah, 515, 640, 641
Rabin, Yitzhak, *639*, **639–644**
in Arab–Israel War (1948), 640
in Arab–Israel War (1967), 640–641, 642–643
in Arab–Israel War (1973), 641
assassination of, 576, 613, 614, 616, 639, 642
bank account of, illegal American, 515, 641

United States, *continued*
Khouri (Rami) on policies of, 446
Kuwaiti relations with, 77
Lebanese relations with, 729
Libya bombed by (1986), 626
military of, in Saudi Arabia, 192, 193, 712
Moroccan relations with, 357
Muasher (Marwan) as ambassador of Jordan to, 547
and Omar (Mullah Mohammed), ultimatum to, 592
PLO relations with, 109
popular culture of, Ghasemi (Amir Ali) influenced by, 305
Qatari relations with, 86–87, 90
Saudi relations with, 393–395, 712
space program of, 83–84
Syrian relations with, 117–118, 122–123
Taliban defeated by, 631, 632
in trade agreements with Jordan, 18
in trade agreement with Oman, 46
Tunisian relations with, 183
Turkish relations with, 261, 286
on two-state solution, 426
Yemeni relations with, 695
United States journalism
AbuKhalil's (As'ad) commentaries in, 25
Ashrawi (Hanan Mikha'il) in, 127
on Cedar Revolution (2005), 25
on first Intifada, 127
on Iranian hostage crisis (1979), 270
Jubayr (Adil al-) in, 393–394
United Torah Judaism, 842
Universities. *See* Colleges and universities; *specific schools*
University of Algiers, Djebar (Assia) at, 255
University of Annaba, Hannoun (Louisa) at, 335
University of Chicago, Chalabi (Ahmad) at, 235
University of Damascus, Hamidi (Ibrahim) at, 330
University of Jordan, Hamarneh (Mustafa) at, 326, 327
University of Paris
Harbi (Mohamed) at, 342
Khatibi (Abdel Kebir) at, 439
UNRWA. *See* United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UN Sanctions–Iraqi Children (film), 652
Unto Death (Oz), 594
Unwelcome Visitor, The (Hakim). *See Dayf al-Thaqil, 'Al-* (Hakim)
Uranium Conspiracy, The (film), 250
Urdun al-Jadid Research Center, al-, 366, 367
Urs baghl (Wattar), 828
USFP. *See* Socialist Union of Popular Forces
Usfur, al- (film), 233–234
Usrat al-Ta'akhi Society, 287
Usuli school of Shi'ism, 703
UTA flight 772 bombing (Niger), Libyan involvement in, 626
Uyun (musical ensemble), 739
Uyunak Anni (Ajram), 31
Uzak (film), 227–228, 229

V

Vainqueur de coupe, le (Boudjedra), 205–206
Vali-ye faqih (religious-political leader), Khamenehi (Ali) as, 427–430
Van Leer Institute, Bishara (Azmi) at, 197
Vaste est la prison (Djebar), 257
Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam (Mernissi), 529
Veiling. *See also Hijab*
in Al-Ani's (Jananne) art, 39
in Amer's (Ghada) art, 93
in Sidera's (Zineb) art, 771
in Turkey, Göle (Nilüfer) on, 309–311
Velayat-e faqih (governance of jurists), Montazeri (Hossein Ali) on, 540, 541
Venezuela, Iranian relations with, 30
Vent de sable (film), 468–469
Vent des Aurès, Le (film), 468
Venus (magazine), 93
Venus, Jenkins (statue), 91, 92
Verniccio, Gianni, 232
Vidal-Naquet, Pierre, 205
Video installation art
of Al-Ani (Jananne), 39–40
of Hatoum (Mona), 359–360
of Neshat (Shirin), 94
Videos
music (*See* Music videos)
by al-Qa'ida, 23–24, 291
Vie heureuse, la (Bouraoui), 212, 213
Vilayet-e faqih (guardianship of the jurisprudent)
Khomeini (Ruhollah) on, 702
Salman (Ali) on, 702, 703
Violence
Awda (Salman al-) on use of, 134
of history, 257–258
Violence (Hanoch). *See Alimut* (Hanoch)
Violin, 731
Virtue Party (Turkey), 284
Visual art. *See* Art
Voisin, André, 672
Voting rights. *See* Suffrage
Voyeurism, in Al-Ani's (Jananne) art, 39
Voyeuse interdite, la (Bouraoui), 212, 213, 214

W

"Wadi al Nisnass" (Habibi), 319
Wahbe, Haifa, *823,* **823–825**
charity work by, 824
music of, 824
Wahhab, Muhammad Abd al-, music of, 818, 819, 820
Wahhabi sect of Islam
Awda (Salman al-) in, 131–135
Ibn Taymiyya in, 433
in Qatar, 89
in Saudi Arabia, 131–135, 433
Wahl, Grant, 784
Waiting for the Messiah (Hanoch). *See Mehakim Le'Mashiah* (Hanoch)
Wa-law Kanat Fula (Saddiki), 674
Waldheim, Kurt, 221, 604
Waleed Associates, 854
Wales, Hadid's (Zaha) architecture in, 322
Wali, Muhammad Abd al-, 856
Walidi, Raghib, 423
Walk with Love and Death, A (film), 249–250
Wall, Seymali Ould Hemed, 3
"Wallahi Zaman, ya Silahi" (Egyptian national anthem), 819
Walls of Gaza (Shawa), 756
Wall Street Journal, 396
Wannus, Sa'dallah, 98, 243
Waqa'i al-Ghariba fi Ikhtifa Sa'id Abi'l-Nahs al-Mutasha'il, al- (Habibi), 318, 319
Waqa'i min Awja' Rajulin Ghamara Sawb al-Bahr (A'raj), 113
War Generation–Beirut (film), 521
Warlords, in Afghanistan, 408
War of the Sands (1963), 216
Washington Accords (1998), 160
Washington Post (newspaper), 152, 274, 397
Wasiti Art Center, al- (Jerusalem), 795
Wassouf, George, 251
Watan, al- (newspaper), Khashoggi (Jamal) at, 432–434
Watani (film), 365
Water resources
Al Bu Sa'id (Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood) and, 46
in Yemen, 695

Wattar, al-Taher, **825–829**
on Algerian independence, 827–828
on Khadra (Yasmina), 419
on Mustaghanmi (Ahlam), 562
in National Liberation Front, 825, 827
writings of, 113, 826, 827–828, 829
Wazir, Khalil al-, 6
assassination of, 6
in Fatah, 6, 108
Rajub (Jibril) as deputy to, 241
Weapons of mass destruction (WMD). *See* Iraqi weapons of mass destruction; Nuclear programs
Websites. *See* Internet
Wedding in Galilee (film), 451
Wedding of Zein, The (Salih), 697, 698
"We Had an Understanding" (Ravikovitch), 656
Weightlifters
Rezazadeh (Hossein), 657–658
Süleymanoglu (Naim), 658
Weitzman, Ezer, 749
Weizman, Ezer, 247
Welfare Association (Palestine), 768
Welfare Party (Turkey), Erdogan (Tayyip) in, 283–284
Well, The (Alberstein), 44
West Bank
art in, of Tamari (Vera), 795
Israeli occupation of, Khalidi (Rashid) criticizing, 422–423
Israeli retention of, Oslo Accords on, 614
mausoleum of Arafat (Yasir) in, 810
separation fence in, Israeli Supreme Court on, 148
West Bank, Israeli withdrawal from
Labor Party on, 616
Margalit (Dan) on, 515
Netanyahu (Binyamin) on, 576, 577
Olmert (Ehud) on, 577, 587–588, 590
Yasin (Ahmad) on, 837, 838
Westernization, *vs.* modernization, 310
Western Sahara, 13–14
Algeria's position on, 216–217, 218, 356
Mauritania's claim to, 13, 356
Morocco's claim to, 13, 356–357
Western world
anti-Semitism in, 527
Awda (Salman al-) on dialogue with, 134
bin Ladin (Usama) on jihad against, 193
human rights ideals in, criticism of, 132–133
Khaled (Amr) on dialogue with, 420
Muslim approaches to dealing with, 384–385
Turkey as part of, 261
Weymouth, Lally, 333
When the Bulbul Stopped Singing (Shehadeh), 760
Where Is the Friend's House? (film), 452
Where the Jackals Howl (Oz), 594
White Balloon, The (film). *See Badkonake Sefid*
White Castle, The (Pamuk). *See Beyaz Kale* (Pamuk)
White Revolution (1961–1963) (Iran), 539
White Wedding (Hanoch). *See Hatuna Levana* (Hanoch)
WHO. *See* World Health Organization
"Who's the Terrorist?" (DAM), 766
Widad (film), 818, 820
Wiesenberg, Menachem, 44
Wifaq (Bahrain), 699, 700–702
Wijdan Ali, **829–830**
as art historian, 829–830
diplomatic career of, 829
Wild Flowers (film), 521
Wildlife preservation, Al Thani (Sa'ud bin Muhammad bin Ali) in, 92
Wind Will Carry Us, The (film), 307
Winograd, Eliyahu, 588
WIPO. *See* World Intellectual Property Organization
Wiretapping, by U.S., of ElBaradei (Mohamed), 274
WISE. *See* World & Islam Studies Enterprise
Witt, Katarina, 404
WMD. *See* Iraqi weapons of mass destruction; Nuclear programs
Wolferman, Ilan. *See* Ramon, Ilan
Wolfowitz, Paul, 398
Wollach, Yona, 656
Woman of Her Time, A (film), 521
Women. *See also under specific countries*
in Amer's (Ghada) art, 93–94
in business, 671
citizenship for, 53
clothing of (*See Hijab;* Veiling)
condition of, 256–257
in education, 89–90
in Family Code of Algeria, 219, 335, 809
films about, 309, 453, 468–469, 521, 602, 804–805, 806, 807
in Ghasemi's (Amir Ali) art, 306
Hakim (Tawfiq al-) on emancipation of, 325
in Iranian Revolution (1979), 35
Khatami's (Mohamed) policies and, 436
in legal careers, 263–264, 401–402
literature about, 213–214, 256–257, 258, 606, 607, 608
Mahieddine (Baya) on, 491
Mala'ika (Nazik al-) on, 502
Meddeb (Abdelwahhab) on, 527
Mernissi (Fatima) on, 528–531, 807
Mesbah Yazdi (Mohammad Taqi) on, 534
Misnad (Mawza bint Nasir al-) and, 535, 536–537, 538
Moqaddem (Malika) on, 543, 544
Mustaghanmi (Ahlam) on, 560
poetry on, 174, 502, 621–623
political participation by, 383, 384
in presidential elections, 35–36
Qabbani (Nizar) on, 621–623
Rauf Ezzat (Heba) on, 653
Ravikovitch (Dalia) on, 654, 656
restrictions on, 225, 257, 592
rights of (*See* Feminism; Suffrage; Women's rights)
Sadr (Rabab al-) on, 680
Salami (Khadija al-) on, 691
Samman (Ghada) on, 705
second-class status of, 335, 336
Sidera (Zineb) on, 771
in sports, 136–137, 209–212, 275–276, 350, 351
sports uniforms for, 209, 212, 276
stoned to death, 680, 681
Suswa (Amat al-Alim al-) on, 787
Tawfiq (Ahmad at-) on, 796
Tekeli (Şirin) on, 798
Toumi (Khalida) on, 809
and writing, relationship between, 256–257
Yamani's (Mai) research on, 833
Yosef (Ovadia) on, 843
Zaki (Muna) on, 850
Women and Democracy in Yemen (film), 691
Women in Iran Website, 680
Women in Politics: An Islamic Perspective (Rauf Ezzat), 653
Women in Yemen (film), 691
Women of Algiers in Their Apartment (Djebar). *See Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (Djebar)
Women's Committees (Iran), 351
Women's Cultural Centre, 443, 444
Women's rights. *See also* Feminism; Suffrage; *specific countries*
Abbasgholizadeh (Mahboubeh) advocating, 8–10